



Representative Phil Rockefeller

23rd Legislative District

2002 Legislative Highlights

A Report from Olympia

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Committees:

- Education
- Natural Resources,
Vice chair
- Transportation

Appointments:

- Joint Legislative Audit
& Review Committee
- Legislative Ethics Board
- Legislative Oversight
Committee on Ferry
Maintenance (Eagle Harbor)
- Transportation Permit
Efficiency & Accountability
Committee
- Puget Sound Council

Toll Free Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

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1-800-635-9993



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2002 legislative session was easily the most challenging I have seen during my four years as your State Representative. But, in fact, it was also the most productive.

After three straight years of legislative gridlock, I am pleased to report on the significant progress we made this year. We were able to address a wide range of critical issues affecting our state, as well as our Kitsap community.

Last fall, I stressed the need to unite for the greater good to meet major challenges to our security and economy in the aftermath of September 11. Some of the challenges were “carryovers” from prior years and others were a direct and unwelcome consequence of the September 11th attacks.

The biggest challenges we faced were: a deepening state recession and revenue shortfall of over \$1.5 billion; a debate over the best way to meet our state and local transportation needs (including ferry service); and finally, continued wrangling over private or public financing and oversight of the proposed second Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

By the end of the 2002 session (we finished on time, I’m pleased to note), we met these challenges and others in a responsible manner. We re-balanced the state’s general fund budget with spending cuts and the careful use of reserves—and we did it without resorting to any general tax increases. We agreed upon a multi-billion dollar transportation plan and sent it to you the voters for your approval or rejection this coming fall. The referendum calls for new revenues and targeted investments to upgrade our existing ferry fleet and terminals, including a Kingston-to-Seattle passenger-only ferry service. We passed a bill for public financing and oversight of the second Tacoma Narrows Bridge, (the bill will save at least \$400 million in tolls over the life of the bond payment period). Also, we passed legislation that is good for our children’s education, our local economy, and the environment.

But the work isn’t finished. The next Legislature will convene in 2003 to deal with continued fiscal limits and the ongoing task of keeping Washington safe, strong, and an even better place to live, work, and raise our families.

Please do not hesitate to share your thoughts and comments on these or other issues and needs that affect you and your family. My Legislative Assistant, Mary Bowen, and I both appreciate the opportunity to be of service. I look forward to hearing from you, and our continued work together in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Representative Phil Rockefeller

■ We balanced the general budget fund operating budget—without new taxes...

The 2002 session began with a revenue shortfall that exceeded \$1.5 billion by March. With spending cuts and use of a portion of emergency reserves and about 20% of the state’s tobacco settlement proceeds, we were able to re-balance the budget with no general tax increase. There were, inevitably, cuts to state services in areas like health care and higher education. Yet in a time of recession and general belt-tightening, we were determined not to make life more difficult for the taxpaying public. The sooner our economy revives, the better off everyone will be.

■ ...And passed a capital budget that’s great for Kitsap.

The House passed bonding authority for the Capital Budget with unanimous Democratic support and 18 Republican votes. We then adopted an economic stimulus plan which invests in the construction and renovation of college facilities, fish hatcheries, first-responder training centers, state park improvements and other long-term capital improvements—adding value and creating jobs that will make our communities safer and better place to live. The Senate agreed to the House bill.

As a result, Kitsap residents will receive major benefits:

- \$1,649,000 will be invested for the completion of the Bremerton Readiness Center
- \$1,354,000 will go toward Olympic College facility repairs
- \$380, 000 will go toward upgrades of the facilities at Kitsap Memorial Campground
- \$2,000,000 will go toward construction of the Puget Sound environmental Learning Center
- \$500,000 will go toward making safety improvements to the Bremerton boardwalk

■ We’ve taken major steps to fix the transportation mess.

The biggest success of the 2002 legislative session was breaking a legislative logjam by passing a series of transportation bills—including an investment plan and new revenues that will go to the voters for their approval in November. If approved by the voters, this plan can get our economy and each of us moving again. A strong difference of opinion persisted between the House and the Senate whether to pass the new revenue bill without a vote of the people. On the final day, the House position prevailed and you, as voters, will have the final say on increasing the gas tax to finance the new investments. I believe we should ask for your approval of this major transportation package. I voted for this bill.

Representative Phil Rockefeller’s Report from Olympia

The 10-year, \$7.6 billion transportation plan will make the following investments of interest to the 23rd District and the remainder of Kitsap County:

- \$693 million is earmarked for ferry improvements: five ferries built in 1927 will be replaced with 4 new auto passenger ferries; old ferry terminals will be rebuilt, and two passenger-only ferries will be added to open two new runs, Kingston-to-Seattle and Southworth-to-Seattle.
- State Route 3 would get a new interchange ramp at the Silverdale-Waaga Way and Kitsap Mall Boulevard and Clear Creek Road would be widened to improve traffic flow.

■ At last, a second Tacoma Narrows Bridge is now set for construction!

Another step of enormous importance to West Sound residents was the passage of House Bill 2723 which allows the use of public financing on this vitally important bridge connecting Kitsap Peninsula to the other side of Puget Sound. This bill authorizes use of state bonds, and will reduce the amount to be paid in tolls by several hundred millions of dollars, compared to the original proposal.



The bill also assures there will be citizen oversight as tolls are set by the State Transportation Commission.

■ Safe Schools have always been a priority for me.

We made headway this year by passing several bills to improve the safety and security of students and teachers in our schools:

- After two years of debate, the Safe Schools Act finally passed the House and Senate. This bill requires school districts to adopt policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation, and bullying. I was a sponsor of this bill because I consider a safe learning environment indispensable to successful learning for all students. I was please to witness the signing of this bill by Governor Locke, along with the next two bills described below.
- Last year I introduced the Improving Schools Safety bill, which requires district to develop site-based comprehensive plans to prevent and respond to the challenges of natural or man-made disasters. I worked closely with our State Department of Military Affairs and with school principals to fashion a bill that will ensure all school facilities are prepared to the best of their ability to deal with events none of us want to see happen. I am happy to report that the Senate version, which we passed this year, contains the language that I offered in the House as a substitute (“striking”) amendment.
- Finally, we passed SB 6351, which requires school districts to provide notice of threats of violence or harm to a student or school employee who is the subject of such threat.

■ We took steps to keep Puget Sound Clean & Healthy.

Last year I was appointed by House Speaker Chopp to serve as a member of the Puget Sound Council. The Puget Sound Council coordinates all state and local efforts to protect and improve water quality and productivity in Puget Sound. I am proud to have been active in securing the passage of two bills that will help protect the water of the Sound, as well as boaters and fishers who enjoy its beauty and its fishing opportunities.

I wrote House Bill 2376 which gives the Department of Natural Resources and port districts, cities, and counties the authority to remove vessels that have been abandoned or derelict. This bill passed unanimously. Another bill that passed begins the systematic location and removal of abandoned fishing gear that can entrap marine life—fish, mammals and birds—present a risk to divers who explore underwater habitat.



Being Vice Chair of the Natural Resources Committee gives me the opportunity to focus on a number of important quality-of-life issues that affect our community. For instance, this year we passed legislation to allow regional fishery enhancement goup to receive state funds for salmon recovery projects. We also continued fish hatchery modernization efforts, and encouraged the Department of Fish and Wildlife to crack down on geoduck poaching in Puget Sound.



I meet weekly, and sometimes daily with Sen. Sheldon, to discuss important issues affecting the 23rd legislative district. We are both committed to ensuring reliable and affordable ferry service.

■ Other important issues needing attention:

This legislative session did not give us enough time to deal with other important issues, such as the prescription drug bill, and the Certificate of Mastery requirement for high school graduation.

The prescription drug bill, which I co-sponsored, would have allowed our state to combine its purchasing power to buy generic drugs at lower costs, and to extend this buying power to individuals who lack access to private insurance. The idea behind this was is to lower healthcare costs and promote greater savings. The bill lacked enough support to go to the floor for a vote. I expect the Legislature will refine the concept and consider it again next year.

To obtain a Certificate of Mastery, (a requirement for high school graduation starting in 2008), students will need to take and pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) at the 10th grade level. Using the WASL in this “high stakes” fashion is controversial. Critics of the WASL claim that this test is unfair to limited English speakers, to students who move from school to school, and to special education students, among others. We need to address these concerns in a fair and sensible manner without abandoning efforts to lift overall academic performance. I personally believe we are not doing enough to help every student succeed. Nor, in my opinion, have we done enough to enable, reward, train, and retain teachers to meet these added challenges and expectations. I intend to continue work in this area as a member of the Education Committee.